

2011

Review of: William D. Phillips, Jr., and Carla Rahn Phillips, *A Concise History of Spain*

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**Recommended Citation**

Campbell, Jodi (2011) "Review of: William D. Phillips, Jr., and Carla Rahn Phillips, *A Concise History of Spain*," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*: Vol. 35 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.

<https://doi.org/10.26431/0739-182X.1019>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs/vol35/iss1/8>

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Phillips, William D., Jr., and Carla Rahn Phillips. *A Concise History of Spain*.  
New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 345 pp.

In the forty years since the founding of the group SSPHS (now ASPHS), enormous progress has been made in the study, teaching, and popularization of Spanish history in the United States - a course of development also celebrated by this first issue of the new Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies. One marker of this progress is the rich proliferation of scholarly monographs on nearly all aspects and periods of Spanish history. Still lacking, however, are student-friendly textbook syntheses of this work. Teachers of college-level Spanish history do have a selection of period-specific books from which to choose, but the Phillips's single-volume *Concise History of Spain*, which covers Spanish history from Atapuerca to Zapatero, is a particularly welcome addition to the professorial toolbox. Part of the Cambridge Concise Histories series, this engaging volume demonstrates the modern relevance of a country whose history is often on the fringe of standard Western Civilization courses and therefore not generally familiar to students.

As nearly all general histories of Spain now do, this book immediately tackles the ongoing question of the degree to which "*España es diferente*." The authors acknowledge that Spain is different from the rest of Europe, but in ways that make it particularly worthy of study: its history contains valuable lessons about religious cooperation and conflict, the rise and fall of an empire, and the tension between national unity and the recognition of regional differences. Spain, far from being the neglected tail-end of Europe, is here a "crucial crossroads" between Europe, Africa, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. The introduction expertly combines a brief sketch of Spain's history and geography with a discussion of its importance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century due to this legacy of economic and cultural interchange, noting for example that Spain boasted the second highest number of tourists in the world in 2007 and is currently the largest European investor in Latin America.

The first two chapters give a clear and concise overview of prehistoric, Celtiberian, Greek, Phoenician, Roman and Visigothic Spain, emphasizing the lasting cultural legacies of each. The third chapter, "Diversity in Medieval Spain," is divided under subheadings that make the material particularly easy to follow, from a description of Muslim Spain through the process of the Reconquest, emphasizing the relative permeability of the shifting frontier between

Christians and Muslims. Political dynasties, treaties and conflicts receive a generous share of attention both here and in the following chapters, as in the detailed explanation of the union of Aragon and Catalonia and of Pere III's involvements in Sicily in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The fourth chapter places Spain in the context of its international engagements in the late medieval and early modern periods. This orientation sets the Columbus story against a clear background of longstanding commercial relations with North Africa, northwest Europe, and throughout the Mediterranean. The authors' scholarly interests are reflected in a section on the wool industry of Castile and its geographical, commercial and political implications. The theme of internal power struggles is also dominant, with a nuanced discussion of ongoing negotiations between the crown and other interest groups (nobles, towns, the church). The fifth chapter, "Spain as the first global empire," is the heart of the book and substantially longer than the other chapters, covering the accession of Charles I to the Napoleonic invasion. However, it abandons the subdivisions that organized the previous chapters, favoring instead a chronological approach that moves rather dizzily from one topic to another – for example, from the siege of Saint-Quentin to Philip II's marriage to Mary Tudor, to the establishment of a new capital in Madrid, to the prohibition of Protestants, Jews and Muslims from settling in the colonies, in the space of only two pages.

Chapter Six clearly establishes the origins of liberal-conservative conflict that would characterize the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Spain, in a carefully nuanced discussion of conflicting issues such as the importance of preserving religious values, limiting the political power of the church, maintaining the privileges of the nobility, the desire for greater political participation, tensions between civilian and military leadership, the promotion of free trade vs. the protests of landowners and industrialists, and the influence of powerful local political bosses. The final two chapters outline the successes and failures of the Spanish republic, the roots of the civil war, and the sources (both internal and external) of support and resistance to the Franco regime. Ending on a justifiably optimistic note of establishing Spain as a successful "European, democratic, and multi-cultural" nation, the authors return to the theme of the country's international significance today as a bridge between Europe, the Islamic world, and Latin America.

The writing of any region's entire history in such a brief volume involves judicious selection and limitation. The theme of political power is dominant, with an emphasis on individual rulers and diplomatic relationships, supported by an appendix listing rulers and dynasties. The influence of physical geography and varieties in regional culture is recognized throughout. While the authors

emphasize Spain's role in an international context, the focus remains on its European connections, with only occasional references to the American empire. Social, cultural, and intellectual history receive less attention, though an extensive literature guide at the end provides helpful commentary and lists of the most recent and accessible books in English on all aspects of Spanish history. In all, this is a useful, attractive, and gracefully written volume that succeeds in its defense of Spain's significance both historically and in the modern world, and it should be warmly welcomed by students and professors alike.

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